

his ways and convert sinners to himself (Psa. 51:13; Cf. Psa. 25:8) God's plan of redemption is for sinners!

What Jesus calls sinners to do is repent. Repentance, far from being a nebulous response to sin, involves distinct actions. Repentance is a change of mind that brings about a change of action. Repentance is not merely to say "I'm sorry" (something we might say if we sneeze in someone else's direction). Repentance is saying (and meaning), "I've been wrong but now I see the truth and am willing to be transformed by it." The first step of repentance, in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, "is heartfelt sorrow that we have provoked God by our sins." This sorrow, coupled with a deep sense of the majesty of God and a profound awareness of his goodness to us causes us more and more to hate our sins. Sorrow and hatred, in turn, cause us to flee from sin. True repentance also leads to "heartfelt joy in God through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works." Sorrow over sin that does not lead to changed living is a sham which needs to be repented of (2 Cor. 7:9,10).

Jesus is still calling people to join him in his kingdom. Those who respond experience deep joy in union with the friend of sinners. But he's only calling one kind of person: Sinners. And his call is not a call to go through religious motions but to repent (Cf. Hos. 6:6). Those who practice true repentance know what Jesus meant when he said, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13).

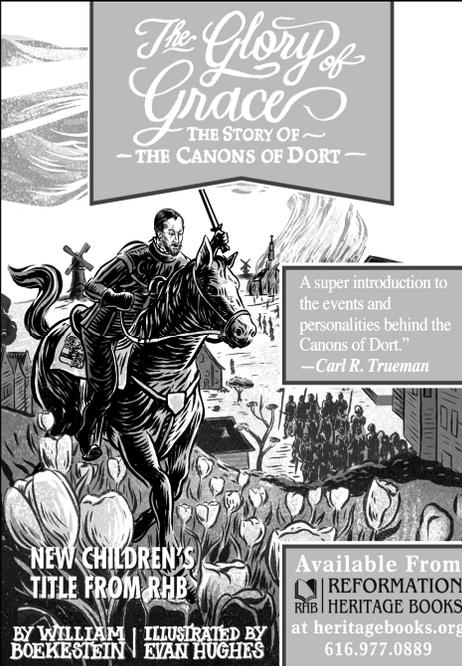
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PROCLAMATION

Promoting robust, religious thought in the tradition of orthodox, historic Christianity
December 2012, Issue 42

ASSESSING ADVENT (3)

TWO (MORE) REASONS WHY JESUS CAME TO EARTH

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

As the Psalmist says, all of creation declares the glory of God (Psa. 19:1). But nothing glorifies God like the incarnation of his Son. As Charles Spurgeon said, "Sing, sing, O universe, till thou hast exhausted thyself, yet thou canst not chant an anthem so sweet as the song of the incarnation!" If God is glorified by the "song of the incarnation" then we should sing it with gusto. One of the ways we do so is by reflecting on the reasons for which the Son of God took on flesh. To do so exhaustively is impossible. If all the reasons for which

the world is equal to the number of people he came to save. But the Scriptures are filled with beautiful stanzas of the incarnation song.

Christ Came to Reveal God's Love

Of all the Bible verses that people take for granted, John 3:16 may be the most remarkable. Somehow, "God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son..." doesn't always move us. But of all the verses of the Bible that should astound us, this is one of the greatest.

John 3:16 makes a remarkable claim: God loved the world. God is the creator of and provider for heaven and earth. He is the only self-sufficient one who lacks nothing outside of himself. He is the Holy One who cannot look upon

THE INCARNATION

GOD BECAME FLESH

- 
1. To Become Like His People
 2. To Bear Witness to the Truth
 3. To Bring Light to a Dark World
 4. To Save Sinners
 5. To Destroy the Works of the Devil
 6. To Give Eternal Life
 7. To Receive Worship
 8. To Bring Great Joy
 9. To Do the Will of The Father
 10. To Demonstrate True Humility
 11. To Preach the Gospel
 12. To Bring Judgment
 13. To Give His Life as a Ransom
 14. To Fulfill the Law and Prophets
 15. To Show Us the Condescending Love of God
 16. To Call Sinners to Repentance
 17. To Die
 18. To Seek and Save the Lost
 19. To Serve
 20. To Bring Peace
 21. To Bring a Sword
 22. To Heal the Brokenhearted
 23. To Give Us the Spirit of Adoption
 24. To Make Us Partakers of the Divine Nature
 25. To Reveal God's Glory
 26. To Reign as King
 27. To Restore Human Nature to Holiness
 28. To Be a Faithful and Merciful High Priest
 29. To Be the Law and the Righteousness
 30. To Show Us the Love of God

wickedness (Hab. 1:13). His desires are always upright. His love is completely pure. His affection is never misplaced.

How can God love the world?

In the broadest sense, the world represents the universe which God created. God loves the creation which he brought into existence through his own word. His love for the now-corrupted world, is bound up in his plan for the total restoration of the heavens and the earth (Acts 3:21).

But more specifically, the world represents the inhabitants of the earth, the human race, a race of rebels, traitors, and idolaters. The objects of God's affection are far from "worthy-causes." Because of man's sin God would have done no injustice by leaving us all to perish (Rom. 3:19). Instead, God chose to love. God uses the word "world" to show the fullness of his love. His love is not limited to people of one race or to those living in one time or place. Jesus is not teaching a universal atonement here. He died for those whom God chose to believe in him (John 6:37) and in whom he works saving faith as a gift of grace (Eph. 2:8). Still, God says he loves a world of unbelieving, sinful, but elect people.

Because of this remarkable claim, John 3:16 also stresses the certain reality of God's love. God's love for the world seems incongruous, far fetched, and even impossible. In order to believe in this love we would need the most irrefutable evidence imaginable. Jesus' coming is the irrefutable evidence of the Father's love for the world. Anyone can talk about their

love for another. But what counts are actions. The Apostle Paul speaks of Christ's life and death as proof of God's love. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

We also learn in this verse of the riches of God's love. The kind of love with which God loved the world was not sentimental but sacrificial. *Agape* is committed and costly affection in action. According to John only one act in the history of the world is capable of defining true love. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10; NIV). God's love for his people is defined by his love for his Son. The only begotten Son is the eternal object of the Father's affection. On two occasions during Christ's public ministry the Father shattered heaven's silence to affirm his love for his Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). It is impossible to imagine the depth of that love that binds the Father and the Son. Our love for our children is marred by both our sins and theirs. Even Mary, whose heart was pierced as by a sword over the death of Christ, loved her son with the imperfection of the flesh. The Father-Son love is a real, personal, intimate, deep, committed bond.

Christ came to earth to show us the riches of God's love. This is the good news of Christ's advent. Through faith in Jesus Christ God loves his believing children with this same incomprehensible love. The Father delivered his Son to this earth to deliver him to death on the cross to

deliver us from our sins. Is it possible that he will now withhold from us any good thing? The gift of Christ's incarnation confirms that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:31-39).

Christ Came to Call Sinners to Repent

One day Jesus went out by the sea and began to teach the multitudes. As he passed by he saw a tax collector named Matthew and called him to be his disciple. Matthew followed and, in gratitude to Christ, invited him to dinner. As the old saying goes, "birds of a feather flock together." So it was with Matthew. Like him, his friends, and Jesus' dinner partners, were tax collectors and "sinners."

The term "sinner" is interesting. On the one hand it was a label that the Pharisees self-righteously applied to anyone who didn't observe the law like they did. On the other hand, the friends of Matthew with whom Jesus dined weren't simply those whom the Pharisees didn't accept. They were real sinners. Many of those at the party probably led corrupt lives. They were the types of people that you and I might be embarrassed to be seen with. Among them were cheats, swearers, fornicators, and drunks.

The Pharisees were shocked to see Jesus surrounded by such unsavory people. Offended, they asked Jesus' disciples why he associated with sinners. As with many of the questions posed by Jesus' enemies, the Pharisees were not asking a sincere question. Rather the Pharisees were assassinating Jesus' character. In their

eyes he is guilty by association. It's as if they are asking, "Doesn't he know who they are? Is this any way for a 'king' to behave?" "When Jesus heard it, he said to them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17). What a relief: God not only associates with sinners but he calls them to repentance!

The people Jesus came to call are sinners. At the end of Luke 14 Jesus preaches on the necessity of following him. As he finishes he says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (v. 35). Chapter 15 begins thus: "Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." Jesus then proceeded to tell three parables; about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and the lost son. Each parable illustrates the joy in heaven when one sinner repents. They also illustrate the sad state of those who sense no need of repentance.

The Pharisees thought they were good. They were not like the tax collectors, those associated with an oppressive government. They were not like the sinners. They had a good reputation. They show us the great danger of deceiving ourselves into thinking that we have no sin (1 John 4:8). If we think we are good we, like the Pharisees, will miss God's program for sinners. The Pharisees rightly understood God's warnings not to casually associate with sinners (Psa. 1:1. etc.) But they missed his commitment to teach transgressors